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AUTHOR Murphy, Louise H.; Murphy, Sam
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ABSTRACT

The study determined the correlation among education students' perceptions of their own childhood discipline and their adult attitudes toward teaching and toward children. Data analysis indicated that those students who perceived their own childhood discipline as rigid and punitive tended to hold highly negative attitudes toward children, but did not tend to condone rigid and severe handling of pupils. On the other hand, students who perceived their own childhood discipline as characterized by reason, gentleness, and affection did condone rigid and severe handling of children although their attitudes regarding children were not basically negative. A surprising result of the study was that persons reared in a non-punitive climate were found to condone severe disciplining of children to a greater degree than those reared punitively. (Authors/JD)

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Childhood Discipline as Precursor of Teacher Attitudes toward Pupils

Louise H. Murphy
West Texas State University

and

Sam Murphy
West Texas State University

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Abstract

The study determined the correlation among education students' perceptions of their own childhood discipline and their adult attitudes toward teaching and toward children. Data analysis indicated that those students perceived their own childhood discipline as rigid and punitive tended to hold highly negative attitudes toward children but did not tend to condone rigid and severe handling of pupils. On the other hand students who perceived their own childhood discipline as characterized by reason, gentleness, and affection did condone rigid and severe handling of children although their attitudes regarding children were not basically negative. That persons reared in a non-punitive climate were found to condone severe disciplining of children to a greater degree than those reared punitively was a surprising result of this study.

Introduction

Teacher attitude is postulated as a primary influence on teacher behavior which in turn is perceived as a critical element in pupil learning (Johnson, 1970; Silberman, 1969). Consequently the literature in education is repleat with reports on the assessment of teacher attitude, but criticism is made of researchers for failing to relate findings to a theoretical framework and to other attributes of teachers (Lortie, 1973). This study correlated education students' attitudes toward discipline with their perceptions of their own childhood discipline in an effort to help teacher trainees to understand and accept themselves and to view their approach to classroom management as a function, in part, of their own past conditioning. When teacher trainees reach this understanding, they become better able to synchronize their attitudes toward pupil discipline with their growing awareness of child development and the emotional needs of children.

Social learning theory suggests that adult attitudes are conditioned by early experiences through imitation, identification, and conditioning (Bandura, 1969; Berkowitz, 1968; Maccoby, 1968). A number of investigators, particularly in the areas of child abuse and violence (Wasserman, 1967; Silver, Dublin, and Lourie, 1969) supported the proposition, consistent with social learning theory, that children incorporate the patterns of control they experience; and these patterns are then repeated from generation to generation (Jayarante, 1977). According to this viewpoint, teachers' attitudes toward discipline in the classroom reflect their own childhood experiences with adult control.

The Minnesota Teacher Attitude Inventory (MTAI) was the instrument most widely reported in the literature in the assessment of teacher attitude toward children and toward teaching. In its original form the instrument provided a single score which the authors defended as an index to the kind of interpersonal environment a teacher would be able to maintain in the classroom. The authors further maintained that the teacher-pupil relations existing in a classroom underlay the effectiveness of the teacher. The authors assumed that individuals scoring high on the test should be able to maintain a classroom environment characterized by warmth, mutual respect, and democratic behavior which should lead to effective teaching. By contrast it was assumed that those scoring low on the test would attempt to dominate the classroom with authoritarian strategies that would result in ineffective teaching. Such interpretations, based on a global score, assumed that the instrument measured a single dimension of teacher attitude.

Recently researchers, questioning the unidimensionality of the MTAI, factor analyzed it and reported the following five factors (Yee and Fructher, 1971):

Factor I --Children's Irresponsible Tendencies and Lack of Self-Discipline

Factor II --Conflict between Teachers' and Pupils' Interests

Factor III--Rigidity and Severity in Handling Pupils

Factor IV --Pupils' Independence in Learning

Factor V --Pupils' Acquiescence to the Teacher

The use of factor scores allows greater specificity in the study of teacher attitude than was possible with the global MTAI score; hence factor analyses have spurred new interest in the MTAI as a research instrument.

This study was concerned with the attitudes of pre-service teachers, junior level education students beginning their professional training. Two questions were addressed: (1) Do students who hold authoritarian attitudes toward teaching and toward children perceive their own childhood discipline as rigid and authoritarian? and (2) Do students who hold warm, accepting, democratic attitudes toward children perceive their own childhood discipline as characterized by warmth and acceptance?

Methods

Subjects. Subjects for this study included all of the 163 education students enrolled in the first educational foundation course at West Texas State University in the fall semester, 1979. Subjects included 37 male and 126 female students whose professional goals included both elementary and secondary teaching with a wide range of teaching specializations. Twenty of the 163 students were parents.

Instruments. Subjects responded to a rating scale designed to assess students' perceptions of their own disciplinary experiences as children. The rating scale was composed of 20 items relating to disciplinary controls of parents and teachers. Subjects responded to each item on a 5-point scale: always, often, usually, sometimes, never. The following eight items from the rating scale were selected as dependent variables:

(1) My parent disciplined me with affection and gentleness.

(2) My parent disciplined me by reasoning with me.

(3) My parent disciplined me by denying me privileges.

(4) My parent disciplined me by spanking.

(5) I had a teacher who disliked kids.

(6) My teacher liked me.

(7) The kids in my class behaved in order to avoid corporal punishment.

(8) The kids in my class deserved the spankings they got and required them to make them behave.

Subjects also responded to the 150-item MTAI. Demographic data on sex, parental status, and professional goals were obtained from the subjects. Grade point averages were acquired from the university registration records.

The data were analyzed using STAT PAC (University of Michigan, 1973). Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were obtained from the global and five factor scores of the MTAI (Yee and Fruchter, 1971), eight items of the rating scale assessing perceptions of childhood discipline, and the following demographic variables: gender, parental status, professional goal, and grade point average.

Results

The data produced a 19 X 19 correlation matrix. Table 1 presents the correlation coefficients obtained for the global and factor scores on the MTAI with the eight variables describing perceptions of childhood discipline. The pattern of correlation for the global MTAI scores and Factor 1 scores are highly similar: both produced negative correlations statistically significant at the .01 criterion level with two perceptions--(1) "My parent disciplined me by spanking" and (2) "The kids in my class deserved the spankings they got and required them to make them behave." The negative correlations indicated that subjects holding negative, harsh, aloof beliefs about children perceived their own childhood discipline as punitive, and punitive discipline observed during their childhood was perceived as both necessary and justified.

Factor 1 refers to teacher beliefs about children and classrooms, beliefs which in turn condition teacher attitudes and behaviors. A high score on Factor 1 indicates the belief that children are responsible and self-disciplined, while a low score indicates the belief that children are irresponsible and lack self-discipline. Factor 1 correlated at the .05 criterion level with the variable, "My parent disciplined me by denying me privileges." Those subjects who saw children as responsible and self-disciplined did not tend to perceive their own parents as restrictive.

Factor III relates to the behavior, as opposed to the beliefs, of the teacher in handling children. A high score on Factor III indicates flexible and non-severe behavior in handling children while a low score indicates rigidity and severity in handling children. Two significant correlations resulted for Factor III. The variable, "I had a teacher who disliked kids" and "My teacher liked me" correlated with Factor III at the .05 criterion level. Subjects whose responses condoned rigid and severe disciplining of children did not perceive that their teachers disliked them nor other children. Subjects who approved flexible and non-severe handling of children perceived that some teachers did nto like children, including themselves.

Factor IV relates to pupil independence and self-direction in learning. Factor IV and the variable, "My teacher liked me" produced the correlation coefficient, -.18, significant at the .05 criterion level. Subjects holding the attitude that pupils are independent and self-directive perceived that they had a teacher who did not like them.

Neither Factor II nor Factor IV resulted in statistically significant correlation coefficients.

Table 2 presents correlations among the demographic variables and the attitudinal measures. The demographic variable, gender, correlated at the .05 criterion level with both the global score and Factor I score on the MTAI indicating that female education students held less authoritarian attitudes toward children than did male students. The variable, gender, also correlated significantly with "My teacher liked me," producing a coefficient significant at the .01 criterion level, which indicated that women, more often than men, perceived that they were liked by their teachers.

The variable, teaching level, produced correlations significant at the .05 criterion level with the global MTAI scores and the Factor I scores. This finding is consistent with the widely reported phenomenon that persons electing to teach elementary school children score less authoritarian on the MTAI than do those choosing to teach in secondary school or in special areas at all-levels (Cook, Leeds, and Callis, 1951).

The variable, parental status, produced significant correlation coefficients with (1) Factor III, (2) "My parent disciplined me by spanking," and (3) "The kids in my class behaved in order to avoid corporal punishment." Correlations with Factor III suggest that the parents in this sample approved of less rigid and severe handling of children than did the non-parents. Parents were less likely than non-parents to report that they were disciplined by spanking; but, curiously, parents were more likely than non-parents to report that the students in their classes behaved in order to avoid punishment.

The variable, grade point average, produced three significant correlations. "My teacher liked me" correlated at the .01 level with grade point average, indicating that those subjects with high grade point averages perceived that their teachers liked them significantly more often than did subjects with lower grade point averages. Grade point average correlated at the .05 criterion level with Factor IV, Pupil's Independence in Learning, indicating that subjects who earn higher grades in school are more likely than poorer students to perceive children as capable of independence and self-direction in learning. The data produced a significant negative correlation, -.19, with Factor V, Pupil's Acquiescence to the Teacher. This statistic suggests that subjects with high grade point averages are not so likely to judge children as obedient and considerate as are subjects with lower grade point averages.

The intercorrelations among the variables describing perceptions of childhood discipline are presented in Table 3. "My parent disciplined me with affection" and "My parent disciplined me by reasoning with me" correlated .42. Discipline by spanking correlated negatively with discipline by reason and affection producing coefficients of -.42 and -.23 respectively. Discipline by spanking correlated with pupil's fear of punishment with a coefficient of .26. All of these relationships were significant beyond the .01 criterion level.

"The teacher liked me" correlated positively with "The kids in my class deserved the spankings they received and required them to make them behave" producing the coefficient, .25, significant at the .01 criterion level. Three other variables correlated beyond the .05 level with "My teacher liked me": (1) "My parent disciplined me with affection", (2) "My parent disciplined me by reasoning with me" and (3) " a teacher who disliked kids".

"My parent disciplined me with affection" correlated negatively with "The kids in my class behaved in order to avoid corporal punishment", indicating that subjects who were disciplined with affection at home did not fear corporal punishment at school. "The kids in my class deserved the spankings they got" correlated with "I had a teacher who disliked kids" producing the coefficient, -.16, which indicated that subjects who judged that children deserved punishment did not see their teacher as disliking children.

Summary and Conclusions

On the basis of social learning theory, it was assumed that people who were reared under punitive conditions would, as adults, hold punitive attitudes toward children and that persons reared with gentleness and affection and disciplined with reason would hold non-punitive, child-centered attitudes as adults. Careful examination of the data in the study revealed two profiles differing from this assumption. The strongest relationships in this study combined to form a profile of persons reared punitively, people who perceived that their childhood discipline was accomplished via spankings as opposed to discipline by reason, gentleness, and affection. Such individuals expressed the belief that children are irresponsible and lacking in self-discipline; however, their beliefs regarding children did not necessarily result in rigid and severe behavorial tendencies in handling children. Although they exhibited highly unfavorable beliefs about children, their responses to questions regarding discipline did not condone harsh, severe handling of children.

On the other hand persons who perceived their childhood discipline as characterized by affection and gentleness did approve of rigid and severe handling of children. These subjects tended to be academically successful females who were not spanked at home and who were not spanked at school. They perceived that they were liked by their teacher and that their teacher liked other children as well. Although they themselves were not spanked as children, they believed that the other children in their classes deserved the spankings they got and required the spankings to make them behave. The paradox in this profile is that the people who viewed their own experience as non-punitive tended to hold punitive attitudes toward others. A partial explanation of this phenomenon may be that girls, conditioned in this culture to be dependent and conforming from early childhood, are--more often than boys--compliant, eager to please adults, and consequently successful in school work. They are liked by their teachers (who are usually also female with similar cultural conditioning) and never or rarely punished in school. Such individuals may feel that everyone should able to comply and conform as they do, and those who do not should be punished. Having experienced relatively little adult disfavor in the behavioral area, they may lack empathy with those who do not or cannot conform to adult standards.

For many years the MTAI has been a popular instrument for measuring teacher attitude; however, the global score derived from the MTAI has largely failed to provide useful data. Recent factoring of the instrument allows for greater specificity and interpretability. In this study the global scores confounded the areas of beliefs, as revealed in Factor I, and behaviors, as revealed in Factor III, to the extent that the data were subject to gross ministerpretation. The factor scores allow one to examine separately the several dimensions of teacher attitude included in th MTAI. Further research on teacher attitude using the MTAI factor scores promises invaluable insight into the critical area of teacher attitude.

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Table 1

Correlations Among Student Perceptions of Childhood Discipline and MTAI Scores

Student Perception of Childhood Discipline	Global MTAI	Factor I	Factor II	Factor III	Factor IV	Factor V
Parental Discipline by						
Affection	.09	.01	.12	.12	-.04	-.07
Reasoning	.07	.06	.12	-.04	-.05	-.08
Privilege denial	-.06	-.20*	.02	-.10	-.03	.09
Spanking	-.21**	-.25**	.02	-.12	-.04	-.09
Teacher						
Disliked kids	.19*	.07	.15	.15*	.01	.03
Liked me	-.01	.01	.14	-.16*	-.18*	-.06
Pupils						
Feared corporal punishment	-.02	.03	-.05	.13	.04	-.02
Deserved punishment	-.24**	-.22**	-.07	0.09	-.04	-.02

n=163
*p=.05
**p=.01

Table 2

Correlations Among Demographic Variables and Attitudinal Measures

Attitudinal Measures***	Gender	Teaching Level	Parental Status	Grade Point Average
MTAI Scores				
Global	.20*	-.19*	.13	.10
Factor 1	.17*	-.20*	.09	.09
Factor II	.15	-.05	.05	.10
Factor III	-.04	-.13	.20*	-.02
Factor IV	.00	-.05	-.10	.19*
Factor V	-.02	-.06	.02	-.19*
Parental Discipline by				
Affection	.13	.03	.01	.10
Reasoning	.11	-.06	-.07	.06
Privilege denial	.05	.04	-.10	.08
Spankings	-.07	.04	-.16*	.00
Teacher				
Disliked kids	.03	-.04	.12	-.01
Liked me	.21**	-.02	.03	.28**
Pupils				
Feared punishment	-.10	-.14	.17*	.06
Deserved punishment	-.03	-.12	.00	-.08

n=163
*p=.05
**p=.01

***Demographic variables designations
(1) Gender: high=female low=male
(2) Teaching level: high=elementary low=secondary
(3) Parental status: high=parent low=not parent

Table 3

Interrecorrelations Among Perceptions of Childhood Discipline

	Parental Discipline by: Affection	Reasoning	Privilege Denial	Spanking	Teacher: Disliked Kids	Disliked Me	Pupils: Feared punishment	Deserved punishment
Parental discipline by								
Affection	1.00							
Reasoning	.42**	1.00						
Privilege denial	- .04	-1.21	1.00					
Spanking	- .23**	- .42**	.06	1.00				
Teacher								
Disliked Kids	-.04	-.02	- .04	.03	1.00			
Disliked Me	.19*	.17*	.14	- .14	- .18*	1.00		
Pupils								
Feared Punishment	-.18*	-.15	-.01	.26**	.14	.01	1.00	
Deserved Punishment	.03	.02	.06	.08	- .16*	.25**	.09	1.00

(n=163)
*p=.05
**p=.01